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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Deadline Extended for Financial Program for Early Childhood Educators

ATLANTA, Ga., (March 15, 2010) – Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning has extended the eligibility period for the FIRST (First-time Incentive to Raise Standards for Teachers) Program. The program, unveiled in October 2009, rewards professionals working in early child care and education (ECE) for earning their first ECE credential. ECE professionals who receive their first credential between September 1, 2009 and July 1, 2011 may be eligible to receive \$1200. The previous deadline was February 28, 2011.

The FIRST Program is being funded by the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. To date, more than 700 ECE professionals in Georgia have pre-qualified for this innovative program.

To be eligible, participants must:

- be a teacher/lead caregiver, assistant teacher, director or assistant director;
- work in a child care learning center or group day care home licensed by Bright from the Start or by the Department of Defense; or work in a registered family day care home; or work in a public or private Georgia Pre-K program;
- work with children ages 12 or younger (early childhood or school age care);

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- work at least 25 hours per week if a teacher/lead caregiver or teacher assistant in an early care and education program, or at least 20 hours a week in a school-age care program. If a director or assistant director, work 40 hours per week;
- have been employed with the same employer for at least three consecutive months in teaching or administrative position; and
- complete a pre-application for the program, which allows the state to "pre-qualify" and track participants and anticipate funding needs.

Care Solutions, Inc. manages the FIRST Program. For additional details, visit www.caresolutions.com or call 800-227-3410 for individualized counseling.

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Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.dec.state.ga.us.